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Mrs C Spencer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Spencer

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 19 - 20 June 2007 to look at work in modern languages (ML).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how reading skills are developing and how reading is used to develop language skills. It also looked at where you are in reaching the benchmarks for provision in Key Stage 4.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall, achievement in ML is good and standards are above average overall.

- According to teacher assessments in 2006 standards reached at the end of Key Stage 3 were above expectations.

- In 2006, GCSE results were above the national average in both French and German. They were below average in Spanish. There is an improving trend in results in French and German. This is not evident in Spanish. Given the take up of languages in Key Stage 4 (90%), which is significantly higher than the national picture, this represents good achievement overall. Almost all students achieve a GCSE qualification in languages.
- Progress in three of the five lessons observed was good and in one it was outstanding.
- In a Key Stage 3 Spanish lesson students were tenacious in trying to respond despite not having had sufficient practice to do so properly. In a German lesson students showed very good prior learning and made excellent progress in developing their reading skills.
- Students behave very well in lessons, show interest, high levels of concentration and usually remain on task. They work and collaborate well in pairs and are keen to participate in whole class discussion.
- All students spoken to know why it is useful to learn a language and said they enjoyed it.

#### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed were mostly good and sometimes outstanding.
- Lesson planning is usually good. Activities are well sequenced in short, manageable steps with opportunities for students to increase their confidence and competence with new language through pair work activities.
- In a very well planned Key Stage 3 German lesson students developed reading skills very effectively as a result of imaginative use of the interactive white board, clear demonstration by the teacher and very effective questioning.
- The target language is not always used as much as it could be and opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge the more able linguists to interpret for others and develop higher order listening skills.
- Plenary sessions sometimes lack focus so that it is uncertain as to whether all students benefit from explanations about how answers are arrived at.
- There is too little extended writing in Key Stage 3, particularly in Spanish.
- Assessment is regular in all four skills and feeds into whole school assessment. Whilst this helps with setting it is not yet used as much as it could be for lesson planning.
- All books were marked up to date. There were some comments and students know their targets but are not always clear about how to achieve them.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school provides three languages in both key stages. Currently Year 7 students take French and all Year 8 students take two languages. Those who achieve well in both continue their study throughout Key Stage 3. Those who achieve less well continue with one language and there is some element of choice. All students take at least one language in Key Stage 4 with the exception of those for whom an alternative curriculum is more appropriate. This will change from 2007 when fewer students will be required to take a language to GCSE.
- All three languages are offered as GCSE options in Key Stage 4. There is no other accreditation.
- Schemes of work are under review. A good start has been made in French and German but in Spanish there is little indication of how the needs of groups of differing ability will be met or of expected outcomes.
- Language learning is enriched by a long-standing German exchange and several residential trips to France. There are also booster classes after school for Year 11 students.
- The school is developing its links with primary schools well, for example through its 'Celebration of Languages Day' for primary schools. There is good justification for this since it has to adapt its curriculum in order to ensure continuity and progression for those students joining the school in September who will have begun their study of French in Year 6. It also works closely with other institutions to ensure a smooth transition post 16.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- You and senior leaders are supportive of languages and much has been done to improve the quality of provision over the last three years.
- Standards in French and German have improved significantly over the last three years and a larger proportion of students now achieve higher grades at GCSE. There has been little change in standards achieved in Spanish and the need to achieve consistency across all three languages is a priority for the department.
- External advice and support have been sought and, alongside strong subject leadership, ML is steadily improving.
- Lesson observations and work scrutiny are helping to improve teaching and learning. Staff have good opportunities to attend professional development events which are also improving classroom practice.
- The departmental development plan and self-evaluation are good. The subject leader has a clear grasp of strengths and areas for improvement. The department is now more focussed on improvement and intervention. Standards and achievement have improved and the key priorities for improvement are in place.

- The subject leader is aware that there is still much to do, in particular improving some teaching and learning, ensuring students make consistently good progress across all languages, and developing the use of assessment in lesson planning to better meet individual needs.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- The school's policy is that all students should take at least one language through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or for whom this is not appropriate take French in Key Stage 3 and follow an alternative curriculum, which does not include a language, in Key Stage 4. The school exceeds the 50% benchmark since currently 90% of students take a language throughout Key Stage 4. There are plans in place to reduce this to 75% in September 2007 as the school thinks this will better meet students' needs. All the students spoken to talked favourably about learning languages.
- The school does not offer accreditation other than GCSE and has no formal plans to do so.
- At options evenings, students find out about the expectations for studying a language beyond Key Stage 3 and the usefulness of languages is part of their careers education.

The development of reading skills and how well reading is used to develop language skills

This is excellent.

- Students are very well prepared for reading in examinations.
- A variety of texts is used from Year 7 onwards, including texts of different lengths from a variety of authentic sources, including web-based resources, and reading opportunities are written into schemes of work.
- Students are confident when reading aloud; their pronunciation does not hinder communication.
- Students are able to re-use language they have read in speaking and writing tasks. In a Year 10 lesson a poster was used effectively to develop students' speaking, listening and writing skills and as a stimulus to practise recently learned structures in French.
- Students are able to use their knowledge of English or other languages to work out meaning. Teachers plan their work carefully, making good use of cognates to increase confidence in reading tasks, and students are encouraged to explain their own strategies (cognates and links with other words) in remembering or working out the meaning of new vocabulary. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to encourage students to use context and other clues such as pictures and headlines to work out meaning.

- Reading is used to develop intercultural understanding, for example in lessons seen students explored the differences and similarities between places in a town and different kinds of holiday accommodation.
- In the most effective lessons teachers model techniques clearly and use pair work activities effectively to consolidate learning. As a result students gain in confidence and are keen to participate in whole class discussion.
- Labelling is used very effectively when new language is introduced so that students are rapidly able to use the new language themselves.
- Students skim for general understanding and can scan for specific information. In a Year 9 lesson students were able to skim and scan texts effectively to find detail and were able to explain the techniques they had used to others.
- Opportunities are missed for students to learn from one another – for example for students to demonstrate with direct reference to the text, how they have arrived at their answers because plenary sessions are usually conducted orally without the text being displayed to the whole class.
- The interactive white board is used to good effect to introduce and consolidate language through matching activities and games.
- Students use dictionaries and reference material proactively and proficiently to understand text.
- Homework is used well to reinforce and extend reading techniques practised in lessons.
- In one lesson students were less well prepared to match new language with meaning due to lack of practice beforehand.

## Inclusion

### Inclusion is good

- All students study at least one language in Key Stage 3 and most study two from Year 8 onwards.
- Entitlement is very well met in Key Stage 4 with 90% of students studying at least one language.
- Sometimes pupils' needs could be better provided for. For example, lower ability students require more effective support to succeed in tasks set and opportunities are sometimes missed to challenge more able linguists to develop higher order listening skills by the more extensive use of the target language, particularly in Spanish lessons.

### Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving standards in Spanish
- improving the use of assessment to plan and teach lessons, taking into account the needs of individuals
- increasing opportunities for students to explore ideas for themselves and learn from one another in plenary sessions.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the school. As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Judith Tolley  
Additional Inspector